



Negotiating Identity through Code-Switching and Code-Mixing: Convergence and Divergence in Gyopo Interactions

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Abstract

Gyopo is a call for Korean-Americans who stay in Korea, and the community is also called the *Gyopo* community. *Gyopo* community carried out code-switching and code-mixing talks among its members or other members of different communities. This study employed a descriptive and qualitative methodology to analyze the data. The data were taken from two "Get Real" podcast episodes. The study revealed that in talks between *Gyopo* and non-*Gyopo* members, there could be a simultaneous presence of both convergence and divergence within a linguistic system. Specific structures or levels of the language structure may show convergence, while others may demonstrate divergent convergence. Gender took a role in the language divergence and convergence phenomenon through the code-switching practices of the *Gyopo* community members. It found that women engaged in code-switching and code-mixing when conversing with someone from different community members but did not do any code-switching or code-mixing when speaking to someone from their community. Therefore, this study enhanced the comprehension of the vagaries of multilingual communication and the role of language in shaping social identity and engagement. Furthermore, it offered valuable perspectives on how individuals manage their numerous identities and modify their language usage in different social contexts.

Keywords: divergence; convergence; social identity; code-switching; code-mixing; Gyopo community

INTRODUCTION

As an Individual who will always be having a conversation with anyone, there are times when the individual tries to adapt with the communication flow in order to be more similar to the conversational partner, it is called convergence. Conversely, there are times when a person wants to grow social or relational space. This is done by speaking and acting differently than other people, it is called divergence. According to Soliz (2016) frequently, the rationale behind employing this approach is rooted in the prominence and significance placed on an individual's social identity, such as their ethnicity, cultural identity, or age identification, within the given environment. In contrast to convergence, individuals often diverge when they aim to highlight group identification and increase or maintain the distinction between social groups in an interaction. According to Wardhaugh & Fuller (2008) both convergence and divergence can coexist within a system, as stated by Wolfram and Thomas (2002, 24). They argue that certain structures or levels of the linguistic structure can exhibit convergence while others demonstrate divergence. According to Giles & Powesland (1975), the theory was developed to investigate and explain how and why a person's speech alters in response to a conversation partner and/or social settings. This can include alteration in accents, dialects, speech rate, slang and idioms,



language, and other nonverbal behaviors (Soliz, 2016). Code switching and code mixing are one of the alterations of language. Thus, divergence and convergence phenomenon could be in a form of code switching and code mixing as what this present study did.

In a multilingual society, each language fills specific roles and expresses diverse identities, and they all work together to meet the complex communicative demands of a pluralistic society" (Chung, 2010). For instance, "Gyopo" community which is the data used by this study, it is a Korean-American community which speak both Korean and English fluently. According to Shepherd (2023), South Koreans possess specific terminology not only for South and North Koreans, but also for various other groups: the term Joseonjok is employed for Chinese-Koreans; Hwagyo for individuals of Chinese ancestry whose families have resided in Korea for multiple generations, indicating their assimilation into Korean culture; Gyopo for Korean Americans, Korean descent residing or having been raised in America. Thus, they will mix and switch code according to the speech partner. Furthermore, speakers who live in a society and family where two or more languages coexist frequently switch from one language to another, either between or within utterances, in order to meet a good solidarity.

Previous studies have examined code-switching and code-mixing among bilingual speakers in various contexts, including Korean media (Pantas, 2018), family communication (Chung, 2010), advertising discourse (Ahn et al., 2017), and identity construction in multilingual communities (Nguyen, 2019; Shah et al., 2020; Yim & Clément, 2019). While these studies have demonstrated that language choice can reflect social identity, they have primarily focused on the functions, effectiveness, and identity-related meanings of code-switching and code-mixing. Comparatively little attention has been paid to how these linguistic practices may simultaneously reflect processes of convergence and divergence in bilingual interactions.

Moreover, few studies have examined these phenomena within the Gyopo community, where bilingual speakers continuously negotiate Korean and Korean-American identities in interactions with both in-group and out-group members. As a result, the relationship between accommodation strategies and code-switching practices in this community remains underexplored.

To address this gap, the present study investigates how convergence and divergence are manifested through code-switching and code-mixing practices in conversations involving Gyopo and non-Gyopo speakers. In addition, the study examines whether gender influences the use of these linguistic strategies. By linking Communication Accommodation Theory with bilingual interactional practices, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of identity negotiation in multilingual communities.

Although previous studies consistently recognize code-switching as an important communicative resource, they differ in their explanation of its primary functions. Chung (2010) emphasizes code-switching as a communicative strategy that facilitates interaction among bilingual speakers, whereas Ahn et al. (2017) highlight its persuasive and symbolic value in advertising contexts. Similarly, Shah et al. (2020) and Yim and Clément (2019) argue that code-switching functions as a marker of social and cultural identity. However, these studies focus primarily on the outcomes of language choice rather than the accommodation processes that

motivate such choices. Consequently, they provide limited insight into how bilingual speakers simultaneously negotiate convergence and divergence during interaction.

Furthermore, while studies on identity construction and translanguaging acknowledge the social meanings of language alternation, they rarely examine how speakers strategically move toward or away from interlocutors through code-switching and code-mixing. This limitation is particularly evident in research involving Korean-English bilingual communities. Therefore, the present study extends previous research by examining code-switching and code-mixing through the lens of convergence and divergence within the *Gyopo* community.

According to the divergence hypothesis, code-switching is motivated by a desire to diverge from or separate from a particular group, whereas the convergence theory argues that code-switching is motivated by a desire to converge or identify with a specific group. Following this, it can present studies that re-examine these statements and provide instances from multilingual environments in order to conduct an analysis of the reasons why people transition between languages. Examination of the ways in which code-switching exists in various languages and social ramifications of convergent and divergent language mixing are two examples of what it can entail.

In general, the application of convergence and divergence theory on code-switching and code-mixing involves investigating the reasons for these practices, how they present themselves in various language situations, and the social ramifications of these practices. The complexity of multilingual communication and the function of language in social identity and interaction can be better understood with the use of this information, which can bring valuable insights.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employed a qualitative descriptive approach guided by Giles' Communication Accommodation Theory, particularly the concepts of convergence and divergence. The data were collected from Episodes 22 and 23 of Season 3 of the *Get Real* podcast. Episode 22 featured Danny Cho, a member of the *Gyopo* community, while Episode 23 featured Hoya, a Korean speaker who is not a member of the *Gyopo* community.

The analytical procedure consisted of four stages. First, the selected podcast episodes were transcribed. Second, every instance of code-switching and code-mixing was identified and coded. Following common sociolinguistic definitions, code-switching was categorized as alternation between Korean and English across clauses, sentences, or speaking turns, whereas code-mixing referred to the insertion of linguistic elements from one language into an utterance primarily produced in another language.

Third, each identified instance was analyzed within its conversational context. An utterance was categorized as convergence when the speaker adjusted language choice toward the interlocutor's preferred language or linguistic style. Conversely, an utterance was categorized as divergence when the speaker maintained or emphasized a distinct linguistic identity despite the interlocutor's language choice.

Finally, the coded data were interpreted to identify recurring patterns of convergence and divergence and to examine potential differences related to speaker gender and community membership.

RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Language Convergence and Divergence Phenomenon

This section illustrated the phenomenon of divergence and convergence according to the conversation between different community, interviewers which were the member of *Gyopo* community and the guest which was not a member of *Gyopo* community. The interviewers were Ashley, Paniel and Junny while the guest was Hoya.

- (1) Ashley : Please, introduce yourself please.
Hoya : Hi, I'm huwon lee also known as Hoya, I'm singer actor and dancer.
Thanks for having me.
Ashley : Thanks for being here. Oh, your English is really good.
Hoya : 이걸 아니고 이것만 연습하고 나왔습니다 (This isn't it, I just practiced this.)
Paniel : 하루 하루 다니면서 담은 영어로 인사는 인사정도는 호의와. (Greetings in English, which I learned from day to day, are at least friendly.)

In extract (1), it can be seen that each of them tried to adjust to each other by switching the code. First, when the interviewer, as a *Gyopo*, told the guest to introduce himself, the interviewer used English. Because of that, the guest tried to fit in with the people he talked to, *Gyopo*, as he is not a *Gyopo*, and introduced himself in English. Also, the interviewer replied using English because the guest talked in English even though she did not tell him to introduce himself in English. But after that, the guest switched the code from English to Korean, which means he was back to his identity as a non-*Gyopo* and could talk in his native language, Korean. When the guest switched the code from English to Korea, the interviewer, as a *Gyopo*, also tried to fit in by switching the code to Korean, too. This interaction illustrates Giles' concept that convergence and divergence are not necessarily mutually exclusive. Hoya's use of English demonstrates convergence because he adapts to the linguistic environment established by the *Gyopo* hosts. However, his subsequent shift back to Korean reflects divergence by reasserting his Korean identity. At the same time, the hosts accommodate this shift by using Korean, thereby re-establishing convergence. The finding supports the argument that multilingual speakers continuously negotiate social distance and group membership through language choice rather than maintaining a single accommodation strategy throughout an interaction.

Language divergence was when the interviewer used English telling the guest to introduce himself as the representation of the interviewer identity as a *Gyopo*. It made the guest tried to adjust the situation by using English to introduce himself which was a language convergence. Then, because the guest spoke in Korea, the interviewer spoke in Korea as well which was the phenomenon of language convergence. In this case, language convergence and divergence existed concurrently.

- (2) Ashley : it's Paniel and my second time meeting him, up close. 준 이시랑 처음 만나는 거죠?
(It's your first time meeting Junny, right)?
Hoya : 네, 저는 처음인데요 (Yes, its my first time)
Ashley : So, ya, 잘 지냈어요 [jal jinaess-eoyo] (how have you been doing)?

In extract (2), it can be seen that Ashley switched code from English to Korean when speaking to different speech partner. In one turn of speaking, she used both English and Korean. First when she said “*it’s Paniel and my second time meeting him, up close*”, it was said to Junny which is in the same community, *Gyopo*. But when she said the next utterance “*준 이시랑 처음 만나는 거죠? (It’s your first-time meeting Junny, right)?*” it was said to Hoya which is a non-*Gyopo*. So, there is a phenomenon of language convergence when Ashley tried to use similar language to Hoya to be fit in. However, she used different language, English, to her community members, *Gyopo*. Also, there is another phenomenon which is divergence when she mixed code in one utterance when talking to a non *Gyopo*, Hoya. In utterance “*So, ya, 잘 지냈어요 [jal jinaess-eoyo] (how have you been doing)?*”, she still represented her identity as a *Gyopo* by saying “*So, ya*” and then continuing in Korean when addressing the utterance to a non *Gyopo*, Hoya.

(3) Hoya : 그 목록에 들어와서 랜덤 (Randomly entered the list)

Ashley : Aa, I see, I see, okay

Paniel : 한 보는 거 고맙게 해요 (thank you for watching)

Ashley : 정말 너무 좋아요 (I really like it)

In extract (3), it can be seen that there is phenomenon of both language divergence and convergence. Hoya as a non *Gyopo*, talked in Korea, but Ashley still talked in English as she is a *Gyopo*. So, she showed her identity there by still using her identity language as a *Gyopo* which it is a phenomenon of language divergence. However, after that, she switched code to Korean again to be fit in with her speech partner as a non *Gyopo*.

(4) Hoya : 넷플릭스가 있을 거야. 아마 안 내려갔으며 (There will be Netflix. Probably didn't go down)

Paniel : my first 응답하라 series.

In extract (4), it showed that there was phenomenon of language divergence when Paniel mixed code of English and Korean when the guest did not speak in English at all in his utterances. It implies that he showed his identity as a member of *Gyopo* community.

(5) Junny : 막내세요 (Are you the youngest?)

Hoya : 저 둘째 예요 (I'm the second)

Paniel : 미국에 그런 거 있거든요 (There's something like that in America.)

Ashley: the middle kid, the middle child.

Paniel : 왜냐하면 미국의 계약한 (because, in the states, it’s like) middle child syndrome

Junny : 근데 보통 [geunde botong](But, usually) middle child

In extract (5), Ashley showed again her identity as a *Gyopo*, switching code from Korean to English which is a phenomenon of language divergence. Even though, right before she switched code there is no one talked in English, she still switched to English as her a *Gyopo*. Paniel and Junny also represented their identity as a *Gyopo* by mixing the code, English and Korean, when they talked to a non *Gyopo*. It can be seen that as the member of *Gyopo* community, all the interviewers did the code switching as they had similar identity causing the similarity of how they talked. This next illustration below was the phenomenon of divergence and convergence according to the conversation between similar community (*Gyopo*), the interviewers were Ashley, Paniel and Junny while the guest was Danny cho. They were fluent both English and Korean.

(6) Cho : So I was like ahaha 안녕하세요 [annyeonghaseyo] (hello) 누군 누군데요 [nugundeyo] (who is it?) and then I started and did some 꼰대 [kkondae] stuffs. I did some 꼰대 [kkondae] sh*ts.

Ashley : What did you do?

Junny : You're not culturally super Korean though. How do you know to be a 꼰대 [kkondae] (South Korean expression to describe a condescending person), right?

Ashley : It's in your blood?

In extract (7), the most apparent phenomenon is code-mixing. A few of them were in the form of code switch, and it is only for quoting, such as “안녕하세요” [annyeonghaseyo] (hello) and “누군 누군데요” [nugundeyo] (who is it?). For the code mixing, it occurred because of several reasons. For 겨뽀 [gyeopo] (Korean-American), 대표 [daepyo] (CEO) and 소속사 [sosogsa] (agency), it was for telling something usually said by the Korean-American for their community rather than say the English word itself “Korean-American”. It showed his identity there as a Korean-American because of choosing Korean word rather than the English itself. Then, other code mixing happened because name of place in Korea such as 홍대 [Hongdae] and it could not be replaced by English word. Moreover, there is 꼰대 [kkondae] which is a south Korean expression to describe a condescending person. From the analysis, it implies that the intension of switching and mixing the code is not because want to adapt with the speech partner in order to be loyal with them by using the language they understand.

(7) Cho: 꼰대 [kkondae] (South Korean expression to describe a condescending person) is always cultural. It's DNA. It just comes out. And I was like 여기는 좀 길고요 [yeogineun jom gilgoyo] (It's a bit long here) So, their eyes were like ‘yo who tf is this guy?’ ...

Cho: Because Korean-comedian were saying 한국에 사는 [hangug-e saneun] (living in Korea) in Korea, stand up is not gonna work. That's been like plugged in to them and they're the 막내 [magnaе] (the youngest).

Junny: And your 꼰대 [kkondae] is like calm down, right?

Similar with extract (8), the emergence of code switching was because quoting something that had been said in the past by the speaker himself or other people. For code mixing, it was also because it was Korean expression which represented their Identity as Korean because choosing to use Korean expression rather than English. There was no speech strategy to customize the speech partner for being loyal which meant that there was no language divergence and convergence phenomenon.

(8) Cho : So that's my point, is that I'm not cheating on the 예능 [yeneung] (entertainment) stuffs You'll hear this especially from Korean “전에도 팟캐스트 한국에서, 근데 안돼. 샌딩도 했어, 안돼 (I've been to Podcast in Korea before, but I can't. Standing too, but I can't).

Ashley : What is it called?

Cho : It's called the 눈치 [nunchi] (the name of a podcast) podcast.

Cho : Beer, red meat. The doctor goes “stay away from broccoli and spinach”. Others like “맥주 안 되고 [maegju an deogo] (no beer), ” 소고기 안 되고 [sogogi an doego] (No beef)”

Cho : We just talk like being 아저씨 [ajeossi] (uncle/an older man) in Korea.

Equivalent to extract (8), code switching appeared because of quoting something not because of any other intentional reasons. Similar with the previous extracts of *Gyopo* to *Gyopo* conversation, there were a tendency of using code mixing rather than code switching in a conversation within *Gyopo* community members. It implied that as had a similar identity as *Gyopo* member, they did not need to use strategy of language convergence or being loyal to their speech partner.

(9) Cho : Those kids were like “이제 다음에 [ije daeume] (what’s next) what do we do next, you know what I mean. So now, those kids are actually kinda famous youtuber now in Korea.

Ashley : wait, do we know some of them?

Cho : they’re called 피식대학 [Psick Univ] (Psick University)

It could be seen in extract (9) and (10), the code switching happened because of quoting, similar with the data before. Also, code mixing occurred in order to say the name of something that had to be said in Korean. Then, the interviewers did not use any code switching or code mixing. It signified that there was no need for them to adjust their language to the speech partner to have a friendly conversation as they had different identity.

(10) Cho : You’ll hear this especially from Korean “전에도 팟캐스트 한국에서, 근데 안돼. 샌딩도 했어, 안돼 [Jonedo patkaeseu hangugeso geunde andwae. Saendingdo haesso andwae] (I’ve been to Podcast in Korea before, but I can’t. Standing too, but I can’t)”. You don’t do it, right? I think that’s the attitude that certain people need to have. Ashley : You have a podcast of your own, too, right?

Cho : Yeah, but it’s not that good.

Ashley : What is it called?

Cho : It’s called the 눈치 [nunchi] (the name of a podcast) podcast.

Overall, the findings suggest that code-switching and code-mixing function not merely as linguistic behaviors but as accommodation strategies that index social identities. Interactions between *Gyopo* and non-*Gyopo* speakers showed a dynamic negotiation of social relationships, where convergence was often used to facilitate rapport and mutual understanding, while divergence served to maintain distinct cultural identities. These findings support Communication Accommodation Theory by demonstrating that bilingual speakers strategically adjust language use in response to both interactional goals and identity concerns.

Gender Role in Language Divergence and Convergence Phenomenon

After analyzing the data, it found out that there were more code switching and code mixing done by the female host than the male hosts in both conversations to *Gyopo* and non-*Gyopo* guest in the case of language divergence. In extract (1), there were the female host did the language divergence by using English which was not the language the guest speak in to preserve her identity as a *Gyopo* line while the male hosts kept speaking in Korean in order to be loyal to the guest. Then, in extract (2) and (3), there were also the female host who did the code switching and code mixing while there were none for the male hosts. While, in extract (4), there was code

mixing done by the male host which could be inferred that he wanted to show his identity but in a loyal way. In extract (5), the female host talked in a full English sentence while the male hosts did the code mixing. Furthermore, in a conversation with a *Gyopo* guest, the female guest fully talked in English without using code mixing and code switching while the male hosts did the code mixing, but only code mixing, there was none of code switching. It could be seen in extract (6), (7), (8), (9), and (10).

In summary, In the conversation with a non-*Gyopo* guest, there was more code switching and code mixing done by Ashley, but in the conversation with a *Gyopo* guest, she barely did code switching and code mixing, even when the guest used many Korean terms. But for the male interviewer, some code mixing occurred when talking to both *Gyopo* and non-*Gyopo* guests, but not as many as Ashley (the female interviewer), even though she was the only female interviewer while there were two male interviewers.

The findings indicate that the female host demonstrated more frequent instances of code-switching and code-mixing than the male hosts. However, given the limited dataset and the small number of speakers analyzed, these patterns should be interpreted cautiously. Rather than suggesting inherent gender differences, the findings may reflect individual communication styles, conversational roles, or interactional contexts. Future studies with larger datasets are needed to examine the relationship between gender and accommodation strategies more systematically.

CONCLUSION

This study examined how convergence and divergence were manifested through code-switching and code-mixing practices in interactions involving members of the *Gyopo* community. The findings demonstrate that convergence and divergence can occur simultaneously within bilingual conversations, with speakers alternately adapting to and distinguishing themselves from their interlocutors. When interacting with non-*Gyopo* speakers, *Gyopo* members frequently employed code-switching and code-mixing as strategies for both accommodation and identity maintenance. In contrast, interactions among *Gyopo* speakers relied less on convergence because shared linguistic and cultural backgrounds already facilitated mutual understanding.

The study also identified gender-related patterns in language use; however, these findings should be interpreted cautiously due to the limited amount of data analyzed. Theoretically, the study extends Communication Accommodation Theory by illustrating how convergence and divergence may coexist within bilingual discourse rather than functioning as separate processes. Future research may investigate larger datasets, different bilingual communities, and additional social variables to achieve a more comprehensive understanding of language accommodation in multilingual settings.

AUTHORSHIP CONTRIBUTION

I am the solely author confirm that I write the paper by myself.

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